



**“What Works” in California:  
Research Shows that Meeting  
Troubled Kids’ Mental Health Needs  
Reduces Crime**

November 2004

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White Paper

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**Summary:** Two previously unreported studies from the California Board of Corrections show that quality juvenile justice programs that have strong mental health components reduce crime. Statewide evaluations of programs funded under the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act and Challenge Grant program were shown to reduce arrests by as much as 33 percent. Key program features include mental health assessments and screenings, as well as development of case management plans that direct youth and their families to mental health services. This research makes the case that serving the mental health needs of youth in the juvenile justice system will promote public safety. Given the passage of Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act, law enforcement leaders and crime survivors call on California to use this historic opportunity to expand mental health services to juveniles—and as a result make our communities safer.

*FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS California is a bipartisan, anti-crime organization of over 300 California sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys and victims of violence.*

**Introduction**

By statute, the California Board of Corrections (BOC)<sup>1</sup>—a state policy agency that serves California’s county and city jails, probation departments and juvenile facilities—is charged with evaluating<sup>2</sup> several state-funded juvenile justice programs. The BOC provided its final report to the legislature in March 2004 on the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA)<sup>3</sup> and its predecessor, the now defunct Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant (“Challenge Grant II”)<sup>4</sup> program. These two state funding streams were designed to support promising programs to reduce juvenile crime and promote better outcomes among court-involved youth.

Most JJCPA and Challenge Grant II programs included mental health and related services. As the Challenge Grant II evaluation notes, “*At least 80% of youthful offenders have a mental disorder; at least 20% have a serious disorder such as schizophrenia, major depression and bipolar disorder;*” and “*more than half of youthful offenders have dual diagnoses (i.e., more than one mental disorder, including learning and substance abuse disorders).*”

Research shows that there is a correlation between mental illness, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency.<sup>5</sup> Some young people’s mental health issues are so challenging that traditional approaches to curbing delinquency may not work until these deep needs are met. Once any of these challenges are met, proven juvenile justice interventions grounded in therapeutic principles have been shown to be effective at reducing crime, particularly when crime is due to aggression or lack of impulse control.<sup>6</sup> For example, one JJCPA-funded program in Los Angeles, Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), has been

shown in rigorous studies of carefully implemented and supervised programs in other states to reduce re-arrest by 43% to 70%, compared to youth receiving more traditional juvenile justice services.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that every dollar invested in MST and other intensive family therapy programs pays off in \$2 to \$10 in savings to taxpayers and crime victims, with net savings from over \$9,000 to \$24,000 per youth.<sup>8</sup>

While the public debate around juvenile justice this year has focused on little else but the controversies at the California Youth Authority, taken together, these two reports provide a glimpse at “*what works*” in California—and providing mental health services to young people is a critical part of “*what works*.” The previously unreported evaluations of JJCPA and Challenge Grant II show that there are a variety of promising programs that meet the mental health needs of juveniles and cut crime in our communities. These reports are clear evidence that improving and expanding the delivery of mental health services to court-involved youth will help build safer communities.

### **Challenge Grant II: Reduced Crime, Successful Completion of Probation and Improved Outcomes**

The Challenge Grant II program was a continuation of the work started under the original Challenge Grant, which provided one-time state grants that had to be matched locally to set up model juvenile justice programs. Based on plans that each county developed to show their crime-prevention priorities, counties proposed demonstration projects that would address a “gap” in their continuum of care for juveniles.

Through Challenge Grant II, \$57 million were disbursed to 17 counties to develop programs that, for example, serve as an alternative to institutional placement and provide “Wrap-around” services, which “wrap” treatment and support around a young person and their family. Other services funded by the Challenge Grant II program included mental health assessments and services to youth entering the juvenile justice system and aftercare services for young people returning from institutions to their communities.

As the BOC reports, in their county plans, “*Nearly half of the counties described the need for mental health services in day treatment settings, on an outpatient basis, or as part of an aftercare program.*” Several counties tested innovative ways to address the mental health needs of juveniles. While San Francisco and Humboldt Counties designed programs to focus on serving youth with more severe mental health problems, “*Individual, group and family counseling were key elements of most, if not all, of the projects and mental health professionals—either from county departments or private sector agencies—were members of most projects’ multi-disciplinary teams.*” Key program features included mental health assessments, screenings and direction to services; drug and alcohol treatment; and related supports and services to youth and their families to ensure that mental health treatment can succeed, including housing, transportation, and individualized counseling for youth and their families.

The BOC analyzed the statewide impact of the demonstration projects (10 out of 17 counties) on youth participants, and compared their outcomes to a “reference” group of

youth that received more traditional probation services.<sup>9</sup> While the results varied by gender and age, the BOC reported the following statistically significant results:

Young males in the Challenge Grant II programs experienced 19% fewer arrests (28.2% versus 34.9% in reference group).

Young males in the Challenge Grant II programs experienced 23% fewer felony arrests (10% versus 13% in reference group).

Youth (males and females) in the Challenge Grant II programs were 23% more likely to successfully complete probation (25.8% versus 21% in the reference group).

Even when individual programs were not able to report statistically significant changes in arrests, almost all the projects *“reported improvements in participants’ psychosocial functioning, conflict resolution and anger management, communication, school behavior and family functioning as a result of mental health and related interventions.”*

While the Challenge Grant program ended in June 2003, the BOC notes that Challenge Grants *“strengthened the foundation for sustaining effective interventions through the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act.”*

#### **Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Reduced Arrests and Incarceration, More Restitution and Community Service**

JJCPA, enacted in 2000, provides a dedicated funding stream for local juvenile justice programs designed to curb juvenile crime. To qualify, as with the Challenge Grant, each county must submit a plan annually to the state that identifies the gaps in local prevention programming. Drawing from public health planning principles, each plan is developed by a local multi-agency council chaired by the county probation chief and includes representatives of law enforcement, mental or behavioral health system directors and others. Unlike the Challenge Grant, JJCPA funds are distributed to counties on a per capita basis, and a local match is not required. Counties are required to evaluate program impact on certain outcome measures, including comparisons of arrests of program participants and non-participating youth, as well as changes in overall crime rates.

In JJCPA’s second year (2001-2002)—the year most recently evaluated by the BOC—\$116 million in state funds were appropriated for 193 programs in the 56 participating counties.

While the services provided to youth by JJCPA are diverse, JJCPA builds upon the success of the Challenge Grant by integrating mental health and related services into a variety of different interventions and approaches that meet young people’s needs. Key program features include assessments of young people’s mental health problems, family

and individual therapy, drug treatment, collaborations between mental health and key stakeholders and providers, intensive supervision and community involvement.

As required by statute, the BOC analyzed data from participating counties to see how youth in JJCPA-funded programs fared on a variety of indicators, including how program youth fared in terms of re-arrest when compared to a group of youth receiving traditional probation services, changes in the county arrest rate, incarceration, successful completion of probation, completion of court-ordered services, and other available outcomes. Compared to the reference group,<sup>10</sup> the BOC found that youth in JJCPA-funded programs were:

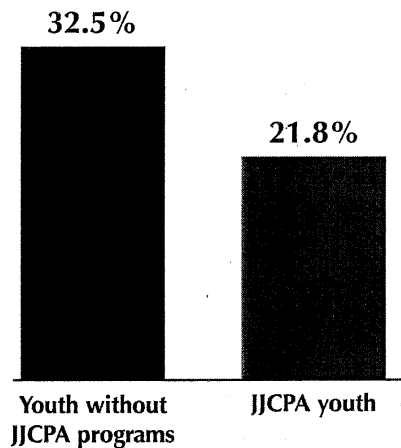
A third (33%) less likely to be arrested (21.8% versus 32.5% in reference group).

22% less likely to be incarcerated (18.2% versus 23.4% in reference group).

43% more likely to complete court-ordered community service (56.3% versus 39.4% in reference group).<sup>11</sup>

### **Mental Health and Other Juvenile Justice Interventions Cut Arrests By One-Third**

Percentage of youth offenders re-arrested



CA Board of Corrections, 2004 evaluation of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act

Nearly 70% of the individual programs met or exceeded their goals for their arrest rate. Overall arrest rates in individual counties declined in 49 jurisdictions, including 19 counties where the local planning council expected no change in arrests and two that expected an increase in arrests. (Data on changes in arrest rates for five major counties are provided in the Appendix below.) Two-thirds of the individual programs achieved their goal for reducing incarceration and completion of restitution, and over three-fourths of the programs met or exceeded their goals for completion of court-ordered community service.

In addition to the outcome measures which counties are mandated by JJCPA to record, a number of programs kept track of other important measures: *Among the programs reporting these outcomes, JJCPA program youth attended school more frequently, were suspended and expelled less often, and were less likely to use drugs.*

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

As discussions around reforms to the juvenile justice system take place in Sacramento, the success of reforms depends on the state's ability to build upon—not tear down—local programs that reduce crime and delinquency, programs that “work.” To continue the

momentum for reform, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* makes the following core recommendations:

1) Continue state funding for JJCPA:

As the BOC evaluations show, JJCPA and the Challenge Grant successfully met their objectives in funding local juvenile justice programs that curb crime and delinquency among at-risk youth and young offenders. But in recent state budgets, JJCPA has been targeted for cuts in state funding. For the 2004-2005 state budget, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California*, along with the Chief Probation Officers of California, the California Police Chiefs Association, the California State Sheriffs' Association, and the California District Attorneys Association all supported these vital funds.

2) Proposition 63 funds should be used to serve youth in the juvenile justice system:

While the prevalence of mental illness among juvenile justice populations is well established, many barriers prevent the mental health community from effectively serving these youth. In fact, Medi-Cal cannot pay for mental health treatment of youth in juvenile hall, probation camp or the California Youth Authority, and there are simply not enough trained professionals or community-based treatment programs available to treat this needy population. Again, according to the Board of Corrections, "*At least 80% of youthful offenders have a mental disorder; [and] at least 20% have a serious disorder.*"

The passage of Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act, presents a historic opportunity to adequately meet the mental health and related needs of youth in the juvenile justice system. When fully implemented, Proposition 63 will raise \$700 million dollars per year in new state dollars for mental health services and qualify California for additional federal funds, increasing the annual total to more than \$1 billion in new funds to provide services for the mentally ill. While the need in California for these new funds is great, the state has a tremendous opportunity to use these new resources to meet public safety goals by increasing the state's capacity to meet youth mental health needs. By investing Proposition 63 funds in approaches that have been shown to prevent juvenile crime, California can dramatically build upon the successes of the JJCPA and Challenge Grant programs, address the unmet needs of troubled youth, and promote public safety.

Santa Barbara Police Chief Cam Sanchez, President of the California Police Chiefs Association and a FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* member, has said, "Twenty percent of a police officer's time is spent dealing with people with mental illnesses, and our prisons and jails are full of thousands of people with mental illnesses who would not be there if they had been offered treatment."<sup>12</sup> Law enforcement leaders understand the benefit to public safety that accrues from a well-funded mental health system and programs that work. This is why FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California*, the California Police Chiefs Association, California State Sheriffs' Association and a half dozen other law enforcement organizations supported Proposition 63. This is also why the proponents of Proposition 63 have ensured that representatives of law enforcement are at the table to create and oversee plans to disburse Proposition 63 funds in counties.<sup>13</sup> Law

enforcement leaders will be strong advocates for directing some of these new mental health dollars to meet the enormous need that exists for the state's troubled youth—a vision consistent with “what works” to build healthier families and safer communities.

## **Appendix: JJCPA Programs in Several Counties**

The following is a selection of JJCPA programs from the BOC evaluations and from the Chief Probation Officers of California.

### Fresno

**Students Targeted with Opportunities for Prevention (STOP)**—STOP is a program that uses a Wrap-around approach to family-based interventions for youth not on probation, but who need services according to a criteria of main risk factors for delinquency. Thirteen school-based sites provide youth and their families with group and individual counseling, substance abuse/alcohol intervention, parenting classes and family empowerment programs.

### Los Angeles

**Multi-Systemic Therapy Program (MST)**—MST is a rigorously-evaluated intensive family therapy program that provides treatment services to youth and their families and has been shown in studies of carefully supervised and implemented programs to reduce re-arrest by 43% to 70%, compared to youth receiving more traditional juvenile justice services.

**Juvenile Mental Health Court**—This specialized juvenile court identifies juvenile delinquents with serious biological mental health problems and provides them with treatment and case management. A multi-disciplinary team from probation, county mental health and the offices of the district attorney and public defender work together to hold youth accountable and develop effective treatment plans.

**Mental Health Screening and Assessment**—JJCPA funds are used to provide mental health screening for all youth entering juvenile hall. Youth receive mental health services while in detention and are referred to community-based mental health services when released.

### Sacramento

**Day Reporting Center**—This day treatment center and school provides various kinds of counseling and educational services as well as community supervision to “high risk” juveniles.

**Juvenile Hall Behavior Improvement Program**—This program provides mental health treatment, highly structured and supervised group activities, and supportive behaviorally-based problem-solving counseling to better equip youth to function, both in custody and upon their return to the community. *Youth who went through this program had an arrest rate almost half that of the reference group and a re-incarceration rate almost 5.5 times lower (9% versus 48.7%) than*



*the reference group, and completed their restitution at twice the rate of the reference group.*

#### San Diego

**Breaking Cycles (BC)**—Through BC, youth who come into custody receive an assessment and case plan that offers community interventions and various placement options (ranging from the juvenile ranch, to day treatment, therapeutic day treatment, and community-based services). BC involves multi-disciplinary assessments by teams comprised of professionals from probation, mental health, education, drug and alcohol treatment, and youth and family counseling. Probation partnered with community-based agencies for youth and family counselors, alcohol and drug counselors and treatment providers, and psychiatrists to conduct mental health assessment and evaluations, and with parent advocates to provide support/referral services. *Compared to a reference group, the BC youth were a third less likely to be arrested (20% vs. 32%), half as likely to have a sustained petition for a new offense (10% vs. 21%), and almost three times less likely to be incarcerated for longer than 90 days (5% vs. 14%).*

#### San Francisco

**Project Impact/Community Assessment and Referral Center**—A program that began under the Challenge Grant, Project Impact sought to improve mental health screenings and assessments, and provide a continuum of Wrap-around, flexible services to young people who had committed several offenses, or were at risk of more serious crime as a result of an emotional disorder. The Community Assessment and Referral Center (CARC), an assessment center in juvenile hall, determines a young person's eligibility and needs, and then assigns the youth to an outpatient mental health team that can provide various kinds of treatment, mainly in a community-based setting.

#### **JJCPA: Mandated Outcome — Change in County Arrest Rates Per 100,000 Juveniles (Age 10-17)**

County	Baseline Year (2001)	Next Year (2002)	Change	Expected Change	Met/Exceeded Expectation
Fresno	8,422	7,537	885 (-10%)	Decrease	Met
Los Angeles	4,761	4,319	442 (-9%)	Decrease	Met
Sacramento	5,123	4,434	689 (-13%)	No Change	Exceeded
San Diego	5,816	5,388	428 (-7%)	Decrease	Met
San Francisco	4,375	3,704	671 (-15%)	No Change	Exceeded

Source: *Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Annual Report*. (March 2004)  
Sacramento, California: California Board of Corrections.

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<sup>1</sup> All un-sourced quotations in italics are taken directly from the Board of Corrections reports.

<sup>2</sup> Previous reports to the legislature on JJCPA were preliminary findings on the first full-year's worth of program outcomes, or an analysis of local program plans, not outcomes. The data reported *here* constitute the first full-year evaluations for the vast majority of programs funded by JJCPA, and these findings are not preliminary.

<sup>3</sup> *Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Annual Report*. (March 2004) Sacramento, California: California Board of Corrections. Retrieved from Board of Corrections Web site:

[http://www.bdcorr.ca.gov/cppd/cpa\\_2000/cpa\\_2000\\_page.htm](http://www.bdcorr.ca.gov/cppd/cpa_2000/cpa_2000_page.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Challenge Grant II: Final Report*. (March, 2004). Sacramento: California Board of Corrections. Retrieved from Board of Corrections Web site: <http://www.bdcorr.ca.gov/cppd/cppd.htm> (under "Challenge II final legislative report")

<sup>5</sup> *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Alison Evans Cuellar et al., *The Relationships Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment and Juvenile Crime*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Henggeler, S. W., Mihalic, S. F., Rone, L., Thomas, C., & Timmons-Mitchell, J. (1998). "Multisystemic Therapy." In D.S. Elliot (Series Ed.), *Blueprints for violence prevention: Book six*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

<sup>8</sup> Aos, S., Lieb, R., Mayfield, J., Miller, M. & Pennucci, A. (2004). *Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth*. Retrieved from Washington State Institute for Public Policy Web site:

<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=04-07-3901>

<sup>9</sup> All of the counties used sophisticated research designs in evaluating their programs. Nine of the local evaluations used truly experimental design with random assignment of youth to treatment and control groups. Eight evaluations included quasi-experimental design with comparison group youth matched to treatment group youth on the basis of age, gender, risk factors, and criminal history. Some data on juveniles and programs were excluded from the statewide evaluation for the following reasons: youth were in the program an insufficient amount of time, lack of comparability between treatment and comparison groups (as identified by the counties), and programmatic focus on youth with no prior history of delinquency.

<sup>10</sup> Similar to the Challenge Grant, counties used mixed research designs to evaluate their programs. For most outcomes, counties assessed their progress in achieving program goals by comparing the results for participating minors and a reference group (i.e., participants prior to entering the program, prior program participants, juveniles comparable to those who received more traditional program services, or some other external reference group).

<sup>11</sup> Each of these findings was statistically significant.

<sup>12</sup> Argument in Favor of Proposition 63. California November 2004 General Election Ballot.

<sup>13</sup> According to the initiative text, the 16-member state Commission that must approve all county plans will include both the Attorney General and a county Sheriff appointed by the Governor. The initiative also states that each county plan must be "*developed with local stakeholders... including law enforcement agencies, education, social services agencies and other important interests.*"

## Acknowledgements

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* gratefully acknowledges the support of its funders and of those who contributed time and expertise to the research and production of this document.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a non-profit organization supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations, and receives no funds from federal, state or local governments.

Major funding for FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* for 2004 is provided by: The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Zellerbach Family Foundation.

Special thanks are owed to staff member Jason Ziedenisberg for taking the lead in preparing this report, and to Alison Little for compiling research data. We would also like to acknowledge Regina Bauer, Barrie Becker, Jakki Flanagan, Sowmya Kadandale, Rob Kaplan, Brian Lee, and Danielle Wondra of the California office for their assistance, as well as Bill Christeson of the national office. Finally, we acknowledge the excellent research work conducted by the California Board of Corrections, that forms the basis of this document.